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1 December 1959

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## Mekong River Investigations

1. It is generally believed, from available data, that the lower Mekong River basin has a potential which can be developed into one of the greatest natural resources in Southeast Asia. Especially promising are development works for hydroelectric generation, irrigation and navigation. It appears that comprehensive, multi-purpose development is best suited for the area, as opposed to single purpose works at selected sites. Comprehensive development of the Mekong Basin, however, is complicated somewhat by riparian interests shared by 4 countries, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand.

2. As viewed at this time, the lower Mekong Basin, the area under study, includes all of the Mekong River watershed from the Burma border to the sea. The total area involved is approximately 227,000 square miles. On a country basis about 40% of the watershed area lies in Laos, 32% in Thailand, 26% in Cambodia and 2% in Vietnam (the watershed boundaries are shown on map attachment 1). It would appear that multi-lateral harmony in any future development works may be difficult to achieve.

3. To date, while the project is in the investigation and pre-planning stages, the riparian governments have worked together closely, and have recently formed the Coordinating Committee for the Lower Mekong Basin. From the time the project first received serious consideration (as early as 1951) it was apparent that foreign technical assistance and money would be required. In this connection, the United Nations has provided 2 survey missions and the International Cooperation Administration, a team of Bureau of Reclamation engineers. At present the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, through an Executive Agent, provides guidance and assistance to the Coordinating Committee.

4. The three survey missions noted above were dispatched to investigate separate specific Mekong Basin projects for possible early construction. All three teams, however, reported that there was insufficient precipitation, stream flow and terrain data available to begin engineering work for any projects. The most recent survey mission (provided by UNTAA and headed by General Edward Wheeler, U.S. Army, retired; of the IBRD) made its report (Wheeler Report) in January 1958. This report is used generally by present planning groups as a guide. Wheeler's report pointed out the specific deficiencies in available data and recommended a program to obtain the needed data for the entire Basin. His recommendations form the basis for investigations now in progress.

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5. The most pressing need for Mekong Basin planning groups is for hydrologic, hydrographic and meteorologic data which are essential for any river development works. The present program assigns the accumulation of the data, together with mapping and levelling, a number 1 priority. Map attachments 1, 2 and 3 illustrate the areas and priorities for which these data are required, according to Wheeler's report. A breakdown of costs and equipment needed is given in attachment 4. It is recognized, that for a comprehensive development program, special studies will have to be undertaken in the fields of agriculture, forestry, fisheries, mineral resources, transportation, power markets and the basin's general economy. These studies, according to Wheeler, should be made concurrently with the first priority river investigations. He also recommended that UN specialized agencies such as FAO undertake this work.

6. Wheeler further recommended that the services of a foreign engineering company or government agency be obtained to coordinate the operations involved in the collection of the basic engineering data, training, planning and other services. The International Cooperation Administration took the initiative in implementing this recommendation by contracting with the Harza Engineering Company, Chicago, Illinois, to perform this service. This contract, amounting to a \$2,200,000 expenditure, represents the initial U.S. contribution to the project. The Harza Company, while contracted to ICA, works in behalf of the Coordinating Committee and the United Nations Executive Agent.

7. After release of the Wheeler Report, several other countries have offered contributions to the Mekong Basin investigation program. Canada has undertaken the first priority surveying and mapping work for the main stem of the Mekong. The Photographic Surveys Corporation, Toronto, has been contracted for this \$1,300,000 project, which includes aerial photography, large scale topographic mapping, triangulation and levelling. The scope of the Canadian project is generally that shown as first priority work in map attachments 2 and 3. The results of this project will not duplicate aerial photography and mapping in the area being done by the U.S. Army Map Service, although some AMS photography ( flown by Worldwide Aerial Surveys ) will be used to supplement [REDACTED]. The Photographic Surveys Corporation project will be carried out under the direction of the Harza Company.

8. Horizontal and vertical control work, which generally falls into the aerial survey project, has been subcontracted by the Photographic Surveys Corporation to the Certeza Surveying Company of Manila, although part of the contract costs will be met by the U.S. through the Harza contract. (Some of Certeza's work has no direct application to the aerial survey.) Certeza, which has offices in Phnom Penh, has prior experience in the area working on AMS contracts.

9. Japan was one of the first countries to offer assistance to the Mekong Coordinating Committee after the release of the Wheeler report, an offer that was quickly accepted. In January 1959, the Japanese began a two year survey of the Mekong River tributaries with special emphasis on hydrological

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studies. An 18 man team completed a reconnaissance in February 1959. France is contributing hydrological instruments and the United Kingdom, a number of boats for hydrographical work. Deficiencies in support by countries other than the United States are made up in part by funds provided in the Harza contract. It should be pointed out that the United States is contributing \$2,200,000 toward the estimated \$5,670,000 required for first priority hydrological, hydrographical and meteorological investigations.

10. The present investigations, which are concerned primarily with the main stream of the Mekong, will be carried out over a period of not less than three years, depending on a continuing flow of foreign assistance. Upon completion, sufficient data will be available for planning and engineering development works (according to an ICA engineer, 3 year statistical data on stream flow is a bare minimum for dam and irrigation works planning; 100 year, or longer, records are desirable). Following the investigations, the riparian governments will no doubt be anxious to implement construction projects for which foreign technical assistance and capital will be required. At least one ICA officer has indicated, unofficially, that the whole project may be unrealistic because of huge amount of capital required. It would also appear that political differences might arise among the riparian countries if and when the project develops beyond the investigation stage.

25X1A5a1 11. Little difficulty is foreseen in procuring the results of the various investigations in progress [REDACTED]

25X1A5a1 [REDACTED] Any other studies conducted by or for the United Nations, such as power, transportation or agriculture studies, are usually available by purchase, through Geographic Attache's or from the United States Delegation to the United Nations in New York. 25X1A5a1 [REDACTED]

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13. Information used in compiling the attached report was obtained from Map Library Division files and from conversations with Mr. Carl A. Cramer, Civil Engineer, Industries Division, International Cooperation Administration. With the exception of references to procurement activity and comments cited by ICA officials concerning the future of the project, which are Confidential, all information in this report is Unclassified.

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Attachments: As stated.  
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